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TV TALK

with BOB HULL

TV • RADIO EDITOR

'Burke's Law' Series Makes Switch to Super Spy Show

"The current trend in television entertainment is wild, far out escapism, and that's what we'll give them," says Aaron Spelling, producer of a couple of wild, far out shows.

"And then next year we'll be back to reality," he added. "But for right now, audiences seem to want to have their imagination challenged."

Spelling points to the new look in his Burke's Law series as an example. The show has been completely revised for next year with only the star, Gene Barry, and his Rolis Royce remaining.

"Here's what happens," Aaron explained. "Burke, the police captain, is called to Washington to serve on an emergency basis with an outfit much like the CIA." Spelling didn't say it, but the intimation is that the suave, sophisticated flatfoot would be a super spy for something like UNCLE.

"His first assignment is to break up a plot by a bunch of Algerians who plan to assassinate De Gaulle. Yes, we're going to use real names and real places but in fictional, could-happen circumstances.

"In another case, Burke has to go overseas to investigate the story that Chinese agents have kidnapped Khrushchev and are using the truth serum to get secrets from him. Another time, Burke has to go after some nut who has painted the underground defense command center in Washington, D.C., with an explosive mixture that he'll set off if the President doesn't do as he tells him."

Real CIA Man Laughs

The writers for the new Burke's Law show are having a ball thinking up new ways for Burke to get into big trouble, Aaron says. "They keep coming up with fantastic gimmicks, like the explosive paint thing.

"Our advisor for the show is a former CIA man. He just laughs at some of the gadgets the writers dream up.



AARON SPELLING

bugged. An ordinary spy might use a phone booth, but not Amos.

Why the switch from gentle, girl-chasing murder-catcher to counterespionage agent? "We were getting in a rut," Spelling says. "We were running out of ideas, guest stars and steam. The ratings were holding up well enough but we wanted a chance to expand the stories and give some personal threats to Burke.

"By the way, did you know that they're showing Burke's Law in England now and it is on twice a week? One week it got both the number one and number two spots in the ratings. They compare Gene Barry to Lawrence Olivier. Isn't that something?" Obviously a cue for The Man From UNCLE.

He says if we only knew what kind of really fantastic devices there are in use, we'd see how old-fashioned we are. But of course he doesn't tell us what actually goes on — just nods his head when we ask him if our ideas are possible.

One of the "possible" situations is the way in which Burke contacts his bossman, a retired general who runs the outfit. Burke hops into his private 727 jetliner and flies to 30,000 feet to radio headquarters. This is so their talk can't be